

THE BLIND MAN'S BROTHER

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THE BLIND MAN'S BROTHER

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

BY BERNARD MUDDIMAN

THE blindman Geronimo got up from the bench and took his guitar in his hand that lay ready upon the table near his wine glass. He had caught the sound on the distant wheels of the first carriage. He now groped his way along to the open door and then descended the narrow wooden stairs which led straight down into the covered courtyard. His brother followed him and both took up their stand close beside the stairs with their backs turned to the wall in order to be protected from the damp cold wind which blew through the open gate over the slimy floor.

Under the gloomy arches of the old inn all the carriages taking the road over Stillferjoch had to pass. For those travellers who wanted to go from Italy up into Tyrol, it was the last halt before the Heights. It was not an attractive spot for a long halt. For straight on here the road stretched fairly level without an outlook between bare hills. And here during the summer months the blind Italian and his brother Carlo were just the same as at home.

The post waggon came in and immediately after other carriages followed. The majority of the travellers remained sitting, well wrapt up in rugs and coats. Others got out and walked impatiently up and down between the gates. The weather had become worse and worse. A cold rain lashed down. After a series of lovely days the autumn seemed suddenly and too early to have broken up.

The blind man sang and accompanied himself on the guttar. He sang with an irregular and often suddenly shrill voice, just as he always did when he had taken a drink. From time to time he lifted his head up as with an expression of vain entreaty to the sky. But the features of his face, with its dark stumpy beard and bluish lips, remained impassive. His elder brother stood beside him, almost motionless. If anyone let fall a copper in his hat, he bowed his thanks and looked the almsgiver with a quick, almost furtive, look in the face. But immediately after, almost anxiously, he turned his glance back and stared straight in the blind eyes of his brother. It was as though his eyes that could see were ashamed that such vision was granted him and that they could give no ray of light to his blind brother.

"Bring me some wine," said Geronimo, and his brother went, obedient as usual. Whilst he climbed the steps Geronimo began again to sing. He no longer paid heed to his own voice that he might notice what went on in his neighbourhood. He first became aware of two whispering voices, that of a young man and a girl. He thought how often these two already must have gone up and down the same way; for in his blindness and his intoxication many times it seemed to him as though day after day the same people came wandering over the *joch*, now from the north going south, now from the south go-

liam was asked to come and see the Governor.

"Well," he said, "did you find a way out?"

"I think so," replied the Governor. "It may not be exactly what you want, but I think it will do. What do you say to a revocable permit?"

Sir William shook his head, argued for a long time against it, and died hard—very hard. But he died.

The Governor, you must understand, was adamant. He would grant that, but nothing more—positively nothing more.

Sir William thanked him, recognized the delicacy of the situation, and accepted—reluctantly accepted.

The revocable permit was granted.

How to get out of the office without making any sign of haste must have demanded one of the greatest acts of self-repression in Sir William's life. But once out horses could not carry him fast enough to his chief engineer.

Everything was in waiting for this crucial moment. Rails were stacked up at every highway crossing. Labourers were on hand. Everything was waiting for the word "Go," and "Go" was the word.

The rails were rushed across the highways with as near an approach to the action of greased lightning as human ingenuity could conceive in the situation. And before Cuba knew what was happening its first railway was in operation.

It was thus that Sir William beat out his competitors, and achieved what to every one of them was impossible—the building of a railway without a franchise.

And it was by this absorbing enter-

prise that the lonely and miserable former President of the Canadian Pacific Railway found himself again. Never from the moment he started on the project has he regretted that he had the courage, in the prime of life, to lay down one of the world's greatest industrial prizes and retire into private life.

Following the building of the line he had to set about developing the vast estates he had acquired in Cuba, and to-day he ranks not only as President of the line, but as one of the great sugar planters of the Island.

He finds the country fascinating, the climate ideal. With a home in the stern, hard, and enterprising North, and with great interests to call him often to mild and lovely Cuba, where the thermometer rarely falls below seventy and rarely rises above eighty, and where even oranges grow wild, his life is rounded out. It is complete and whole. And every one of the hobbies which he suddenly found so stale and profitless when he had actually taken the step of retiring into private life, he now finds more engrossing than ever. He is a man of enormous wealth and of multitudinous interests and hobbies. He is so busy that actually at times he refuses to go to bed at all—can't spare the time. Life is too interesting, and he has too much to do.

"And after all," he will say, "why should I go to bed every night? Sleep is only a habit."

There is a moral in this story for every busy man who hankers after a life of ease. To point it I am greatly tempted. But I refrain from the luxury, and leave it to each reader to find the moral for himself.



ing north. And so, too, he knew this young couple for a long time.

Carlo came back and handed Geronimo a glass of wine. The blind man turned towards the young couple and said:

"Your health, gentlefolk!"

"Thanks," said the young man; but the girl pressed close beside him, for the blind man seemed to her a dismal sight.

Just then a carriage with a noisy company, father, mother, children and a nurse, drove in.

"A German family," Geronimo said softly to Carlo.

The father gave every one of the children a coin and they were each allowed to throw it into the beggar's hat. Geronimo bent his head every time in thanks. The eldest child regarded the blind man's face with a terrified curiosity. Carlo examined the boy. He was forced, as always at the sight of such a boy, to think that Geronimo was just about the same age when the accident had happened through which he had lost his eyesight. For he remembered that day just as though it was to-day, after twenty years, with absolute clearness. Still to-day the child's shrill cry rang in his ears with which little Geronimo had sunk down on the turf. Still to-day he saw the sunshine playing and shimmering on the white garden wall, and heard again the Sunday bells which had just started at that moment to peal. He had shot as often with his pellets at the ash tree beside the wall, and when he heard the cry he thought at once that he must have hurt his little brother, who had just run by. He let the blowpipe slip from his hands, jumped through the window into the garden and rushed towards his little brother, who lay on the grass weeping. Over his right cheek and down his neck the blood was flowing. At the same moment their father had come from the fields home through the little garden gate and now both knelt nonplussed beside the weeping child. Neighbours has-

tened from nearby. Old Vanetti was the first who succeeded in getting the little one's hands from his face. Then the smith, with whom Carlo at that time was apprenticed, and who understood a little about wounds, came too and saw at once that the child's right eye was lost. The doctor, who came from Poschiavo that evening, could not help them any more. Indeed, he pointed out already the danger with which the other eye was threatened, and he proved right. A year later the world was all wrapt in darkness for Geronimo.

At the beginning they tried to convince him that he would be healed later, and he seemed to believe it. Carlo, who knew the truth, at that time wandered day and night long over the countryside, between the vineyards and in the woods around, and was near killing himself. But the Holy Spirit, to whom he entrusted himself, made it manifest to him that it was his duty to live and to dedicate his life to his brother. Carlo recognised this. A singular compassion seized him. Only when he was with the blind child, when he stroked his hair, dared to kiss his forehead, told him tales, took him walking in the fields, behind the house and among the rows of vines, did his own pain moderate. He had, from the very beginning, neglected his training in the smithy because he could not tear himself away from his brother and could no longer make up his mind to take up again his trade in spite of his father's warnings and grief. One day it occurred to Carlo that Geronimo had completely ceased from speaking of his misfortune. At once he knew the reason. The blind boy had come to the inevitable conclusion that he would never see again the sky, the hills, the roads, the people and the light. It was then Carlo suffered more than ever before—so greatly that he sought to calm himself with the thought that he had brought on the misfortune without any intent. And often, when in the early morn-

ing he watched his brother who lay beside him, he was seized with such a grief at seeing him wake that he used to go out into the garden, only that he might not be there beside him as the blind eyes seemed every day, once again, to seek the light which was forever extinguished for them. It was at that time a sudden idea occurred to Carlo to have Geronimo further trained in music as he had a pleasant voice. The schoolmaster from Tola often on a Sunday came over and taught him to play the guitar. At that time the blind boy had no prescience that the new-learned art would one day earn him his livelihood.

From that sorrowful Sunday, bad luck always seemed to dog the house of old Lagardi. One year after the other the harvest turned out bad. A small sum of money which the old man had saved was tricked from him by a relation. And when, on a sweltering August day, in the open field, he sank under a stroke and died, he left nothing except debts. The small home was sold up and the two brothers were roofless and poor, and left the village.

Carlo was twenty, Geronimo fifteen years old. Then began their begging wandering life which had lasted up to to-day. At the beginning Carlo had thought he might find some trade which would support at the same time himself and his brother; but it never succeeded. Besides, Geronimo never had any rest; he wanted always to be on the move.

For twenty years they had roamed over the roads and passes in northern Italy and in southern Tyrol, always wherever the thickest stream of travellers passed by.

And although Carlo, after so many years, no longer felt the burning pang with which formerly every beam of the sun, the appearance of every pleasant countryside, had made him feel, there still remained in him an unceasingly gnawing compassion as constant and unknown to him as

the beat of his heart and his breath. And he was glad when Geronimo drank.

The carriage with the German family had rolled away. Carlo sat down as though he did it with pleasure upon the lowest step of the stairs; but Geronimo remained standing with his arms hanging down loose and his head turned upwards to the sky.

Maria, the maid, came out of the indoor.

"Have you earned much to-day?" she cried down to them.

Carlo did not even turn round. The blind man bent down after his glass, took it up from the floor and drank to Maria. She often sat of an evening in the inn room beside him; he knew, too, she was beautiful.

Carlo bent forward and looked out over the road. The wind blew and the rain spattered down so that the rolling of the approaching carriage was drowned in the loud noise. Carlo stood up and took once more his place beside his brother. Geronimo began to sing at the very moment the carriage drove up, in which only one passenger sat. The driver quickly took the horses out and then hurried up into the inn room. The traveller remained sitting for a time in his corner, completely wrapped up in a gray waterproof. He seemed not to hear a word of the song. But after a while he sprang out of the carriage and walked up and down with great haste, without, however, going far from the carriage. He continued rubbing his hands together as though to warm himself. At last he seemed to notice the beggar. He went and stood opposite him and for a long time gazed at him as though examining him. Carlo slightly bent his head as for a greeting. The traveller was a very young man, with a pleasant beardless face and restless eyes. After he had been standing for a while before the beggar, he suddenly hastened back to the gate through which he would have to continue his journey and peevishly shook his head

at the comfortless outlook of rain and mist.

"He has gone now?" asked Geronimo.

"Not yet," answered Carlo. "He will give something worth while when he starts off."

The traveller came back again and leaned against the shafts of the carriage. The blind man began to sing again and immediately the young man seemed to listen with the greatest interest. The hostler appeared and put the horses between the shafts again. And then as though the idea had occurred to him for the first time, the young man put his hand in his pocket and gave Carlo a franc.

"O thank you, thank you," the latter said.

The traveller sat down in the carriage, wrapping himself again in his coat. Carlo picked up from the floor the wineglass and went up the wooden stairs. Geronimo continued singing. The traveller leaned out of the carriage and shook his head with an expression at the same time of superiority and sadness. Suddenly an idea seemed to occur to him and he laughed. Then he spoke to the blind man, who stood scarcely two steps distant from him.

"What's your name, my man?"

"Geronimo."

"Well, Geronimo, don't let yourself be cheated."

At this moment the coachman appeared on the top step of the stairs.

"How, *gnädiger* Herr, cheated?"

"I have given your comrade a twenty-franc piece."

"O Herr, thank you, thank you."

"Yes, but take care m—"

"He is my brother, Herr; he will not cheat me."

The young man paused a moment, but whilst he still remained silent, the coachman had climbed on the box and had whipped up the horses. The young man leaned back with a shake of his head, as much as to say:

"Fate, take thy course."

And the carriage rolled away.

The blind man stretched out his hands after it in an expressive gesture of gratitude. Just then he heard Carlo, who had come out of the inn room. He called down:

"Come, Geronimo, it's warm up here. Maria has made a fire."

Geronimo nodded, took his guitar under his arm and felt his way up the railing of the stairs. Upon the stairs he already cried out:

"Let me feel it! What a time it is since I felt a gold piece."

"What's the matter?" asked Carlo. "Of what are you talking?"

As soon as Geronimo reached the top, he groped with his two hands for the hand of his brother, a sign with which he was always wont to express his joy or affection.

"Carlo, my dear brother, there are after all such beings as good-hearted people!"

"To be sure," said Carlo. "Up till now there's two lira and thirty centissimi, and here too is some Austrian money, perhaps half a lira."

"And twenty francs—and twenty francs!" cried Geronimo. "I know all about it!" He reeled into the room and sat down heavily on the bench.

"What do you know?" said Carlo.

"Now, give over joking! Put it into my hand! What a time it is since I had in this hand a piece of gold!"

"What do you want, then? Wherever must I get a gold piece? There's two or three Lira."

The blind man banged the table.

"That's enough, enough! Do you want to keep it close from me?"

Carlo regarded his brother in a troubled and amazed fashion. He sat down beside him and approached quite close and took hold of his arm to propitiate him.

"I keep nothing close from you. How ever could you think it? No one's ever given me a gold piece."

"But he told me, then!"

"Who?"

"Why, the young man who kept walking up and down."

"What? I don't understand you."

"He says to me: 'What's your name, my man?' and then: 'Take heed, take heed, don't let yourself be cheated.'"

"You must have been dreaming, Geronimo—that is all nonsense."

"Nonsense? Why, I heard him, and I hear all right. 'Don't let yourself be cheated; I have given a gold piece.' . . . No, he said this: 'I have given him a twenty-franc piece.'"

The landlord came in:

"Now, what's up with you? Have you given up your business? A four-horse carriage has just driven up."

"Come on," cried Carlo, "come on."

Geronimo remained sitting.

"Why? why must I come? What good is it to me? You stand alongside and . . ."

Carlo shook his arm.

"Still come on down below."

Geronimo silently obeyed his brother; but upon the stairs he said:

"We'll speak about it yet, we'll speak about it yet."

Carlo did not realise what had happened. Why had Geronimo suddenly lost his senses? For even when he had been the slightest degree put out he had never before spoken in this way.

In the newly-arrived carriage sat two Englishmen. Carlo held his hat out before him and the blind man sang. One of the Englishmen got out and threw some coppers in Carlo's hat. Carlo said, "Thank you," and then, as though to himself, "Twenty centissimi." Geronimo's face remained immovable; he began a new song. The carriage with the two Englishmen drove off. Silently the brothers climbed up the stairs. Geronimo sat down on the bench. Carlo remained standing by the stove.

"Why don't you say something?" asked Geronimo.

"But," answered Carlo, "it can only be as I told you." His voice trembled a little.

"What did you say?" asked Geronimo.

"It was perhaps a madman."

"A madman? That would indeed be capital! If someone says: 'I have given your brother twenty francs,' he is, of course, mad! Ah, and why did he say: 'Don't let yourself be cheated,' eh?"

"Perhaps, too, he wasn't mad; but there are people who play jokes on us poor people—"

"What!" cried Geronimo, "jokes? Yes, that you mustn't say—I've expected that!"

He drank down his glass of wine which stood before him.

"But, Geronimo," cried Carlo, and he felt that he could scarcely speak for consternation, "why musn't I? How can you think—?"

"Why does your voice tremble—eh—why?"

"Geronimo, I assure you, I—"

"Well, and I don't believe you. You are laughing now. Oh, I know that you are laughing now!"

The hostler cried from below:

"Hi! blind man, people here!"

Quite mechanically the brothers got up and descended the stairs. Two carriages had at the same moment arrived, one with three gentlemen, the other with an old married couple. Geronimo sang; Carlo stood beside him without any power to think. What could he do? His brother did not believe him! How ever had it become possible? He anxiously eyed from the side Geronimo who sang his songs in a broken voice. It seemed to him that he saw thoughts fleeting across his face which he had never before perceived there.

The carriages had already gone, but Geronimo sang on. Carlo dared not interrupt him. He did not know what he ought to say; he was afraid that his voice would again tremble. Then laughter rang out from above, and Maria cried:

"What are you going on singing for? From me, to be sure, you won't get anything."

Geronimo stopped in the middle of a melody; it sounded as though his voice and the strings had snapped at the same moment. Then he went up the steps and Carlo followed him. In the inn room the latter sat down beside him. What ought he to do? Nothing else remained for him. He must try once again to explain to his brother.

"Geronimo," he said, "I swear to you. . . . Just think for a moment yourself, how can you believe that I. . . ."

Geronimo remained silent. His blind eyes seemed to look out through the window into the gray mist. Carlo went on thinking: "Well, he hasn't any need to be so senseless; he has made a mistake—yes, he is mistaken—" But he knew well that he himself did not believe what he said.

Geronimo made an impatient movement. But Carlo went on with sudden vivacity:

"For what, then, should I—? You know yourself, I eat and drink no more than you, and when I buy myself a new coat—you know it yourself—what do I want then with so much money? What should I do with it then?"

In answer Geronimo hissed between his teeth:

"Don't lie, I hear how you are lying!"

"I am not lying, Geronimo, I am not lying," said Carlo horrified.

"Why, have you already given it her, eh? Or will she get it later?" cried Geronimo.

"Maria?"

"Who, then, else but Maria? Ah, you liar, you thief!" And as though he did not wish to sit any longer beside him, he pushed his brother in the side with his elbow.

Carlo got up. For a moment he looked at his brother, then he left the room and went down the steps into the court. He gazed with wide open eyes out upon the road, which lay before him buried in brownish mist. The rain had left off. Carlo stuck

his hand in his trousers pockets and went out in the open. It seemed to him as though his brother had hunted him out. What was it that had happened? He could not at all understand it. What kind of man must it have been, he who gave a franc and said it was twenty? He must assuredly have had some reason for it? And Carlo sought in his memory whether he had not made in some place someone his enemy, who now had sent another that he might revenge himself. But for so far back as he could think he had never injured anyone, never had had before any serious quarrel with anyone. Assuredly for the past twenty years he had done nothing else but stand in the yards of inns or at the ends of streets with his hat in his hand. Was it possible someone had a spite against him on account of a girl? But how long it was now since he had anything to do with one. The waitress in La Rosa had been the last in the spring of the year before—but about her certainly no one had been jealous of him. . . . There was absolutely nothing to give him a clue. What kind of folk were out there in the world which he knew not? From everywhere they came here. What did he know of them? Had there been any reason at all for this stranger, that he said to Geronimo: "I have given your brother twenty francs." Yes, really. But what was to be done now? As things were, it was plain that Geronimo mistrusted him. That he could not bear. He must attempt something or other to end it. He hastened back. When he entered the inn room again, Geronimo lay outstretched on a bench and seemed not to notice Carlo's entrance. Maria brought the two food and drink. Neither spoke during the meal a word. When Maria took away the dishes, Geronimo burst out laughing suddenly and said to her:

"What will you buy with it, then?"

"Buy with what?"

"Oh, now, now, what is it going to be? A new dress or ear-rings?"

"What does he want from me?" She turned to Carlo.

At that moment there was a creaking in the courtyard below of heavily-laden cart-loads, loud voices echoed up, and Maria hastened below. A couple of minutes afterwards three carters came in and took their places at a table. The landlord came in to greet them. They were cursing the bad weather.

"To-night," said one of them, "we shall have snow."

A second began to relate how he was snowed in ten years ago in the middle of August and was nearly frozen to death. Maria sat down with them. Then the hostler came up and inquired after his parents who dwelt in the valley at Bormio.

Once more a carriage came with travellers. Geronimo and Carlo went below. Geronimo sang; Carlo held out his hat, and the travellers gave them alms. Geronimo seemed now to be quite quiet. He often asked, "How much?" and nodded his head slightly at Carlo's answer. In the meanwhile Carlo himself tried to master his own thoughts. But he had always the dull feeling that something awful had happened and that he was quite helpless. As the brothers again ascended the steps they heard the confused laughing and talking of the carters. The youngest cried out to Geronimo: "Come on and sing us something. We'll pay all right!" and turning to the others he added: "Won't we?"

Maria, who had just come in with a bottle of red wine, said:

"Don't have anything to do with him to-day, he is in vile temper."

Despite her answer, Geronimo stood out in the middle of the room and began to sing. When he finished, the carters clapped their hands.

"Come on over here, Carlo," cried one, "we can throw our money in your hat like the people below!" and he took some small change and held

up his hand high, as though he wanted to make it jingle down into the hat which Carlo held out to him. But the blind man seized the carter's arm and said, "My good friend, my good friend! It may fall near by—near-by!"

"What do you mean 'near by'?"

"Oh, well, in Maria's lap."

All laughed, the landlord and Maria included, while Carlo alone stood motionless by. Never had Geronimo made such a joke.

"Sit down with us," cried the carters. "You are a jolly chap!" And they squeezed up together to make room for Geronimo. The conversation waxed louder and louder and more confused. Geronimo talked louder and more merrily than ever before, and never ceased to drink. Just as Maria came in again he wanted to draw her to him. But as one of the carters said, laughing:

"Perhaps you think she is beautiful? To tell you the truth, she is an ugly old hag."

But the blind man pulled Maria on his knees.

"You are all thickheads," he said. "Do you think I want my eyes to see? I know another thing, too, where Carlo is now—eh!—he is standing there by the stove with his hands in his trousers pockets and laughing!"

All looked towards Carlo, who, with gaping mouth, leaned towards the stove and now in reality twisted his face to a grin as though he dare not give his brother the lie.

The hostler came in. If the carters still wanted to be in Bormio before dark, they must bestir themselves. They got up and took a noisy departure.

Once again the brothers were alone in the inn room. It was the hour at which they were accustomed to a rule to sleep. The whole inn sank into quiet as usual about this time, the first hours of the afternoon. Geronimo with his head on the table seemed to sleep. At first Carlo wan-

dered around, then he sat down on the bench. He was very tired. It seemed to him as though he was wrapped in a heavy dream. He had to think of all kinds of things, of yesterday, of the day before yesterday, and all the days before that, and particularly of the warm summer days and the white country roads, over which he had been wont to wander with his brother. And all was so distant and as incomprehensible as if it could never have happened.

Late in the afternoon the post came from Tyrol, and soon after at small intervals came the coaches taking the same road back south. On four occasions the brothers descended into the court. And as they came up for the last time the twilight had fallen, and the little oil lamp, which hung down from the ceiling flickered. Workmen from a neighbouring quarry came by to their wooden shacks, that lay about 200 feet below the inn. Geronimo sat down by himself; Carlo remained alone at his table. It seemed to the latter that his loneliness had already lasted a great while. He heard later Geronimo outside, in a loud voice, almost a cry, speak of his childhood, of that which he had seen with his own eyes and still remembered quite well in every detail; persons and things; his father and how he worked in the fields, the small garden with the ash tree beside the wall, the low little house which had belonged to them, the two little daughters of the cobbler, the vineyard behind the church, and then too his own child, how it had looked at him from a looking glass. How often Carlo had heard all these things. To-day he could not endure them. They sounded so different from what they had previously. Every word Geronimo spoke took on a new meaning and seemed to turn itself against him. He slunk outside and went again over the country road which now lay quite in darkness. The rain had ceased, the air was very cold and an idea seemed

to be enticing Carlo to go on farther, farther and farther, deep into the darkness, to lay himself down at the end, somewhere in the ditch, to fall asleep and never again to waken. Suddenly he heard the rolling of a carriage and caught sight of the shimmering light of two lanterns which came nearer and nearer. In the carriage, which passed by, sat two gentlemen. One of them, with a narrow beardless face, started with fright as the form of Carlo loomed out of the dark into the light of the lanterns. Carlo, who had stood still, lifted his hat. The carriage, with its lights, disappeared. Once again Carlo stood in the deep gloom. Suddenly he started. For the first time in his life the dark made him afraid. It came on him that he could not endure it a minute longer. In some wondrous way, the horror which he himself had felt on his own account confused itself in his dull wits with a sympathy, that was almost torture, for his blind brother, and it drove him home.

When he entered the inn room he perceived the two travellers who had previously driven past him, sitting at a table with a bottle of red wine and talking very earnestly together. They scarcely looked up at his entrance.

At another table Geronimo sat as before among the labourers.

"Where have you been keeping yourself, then?" the landlord, who was just going out of the door, said to him. "Why do you leave your brother alone?"

"Is there anything the matter?" Carlo asked with a start.

"Geronimo is treating the crowd. Of course, it's all the same to me, but you should just bear in mind that bad times again are not far off."

Carlo went softly over to his brother and took hold of his arm.

"Come," he said.

"What do you want?" cried Geronimo.

"Come to bed," Carlo answered.

"Leave me alone, leave me alone! I earn the money. I can do what I want with my own money—eh? You can't keep the whole lot away from me. Oh, you mean well—he gives me all? Oh, no, I know, I am only a blindman! But there are people . . . there are kind people who say to me: 'I have given that brother of yours twenty francs!'"

The workmen burst out laughing.

"That's enough!" said Carlo, "come!"

And he pulled his brother along with him and almost dragged him upstairs, up to the cold garret where they had their quarters. All the way up Geronimo cried out: "Yes, now the day has come, yes, now I know! ah just you wait! Where is she? Where is Maria? Or have you put it in the savings bank? Oh I know I sing for you, I play the guitar, you live off me—and you . . . you're a thief!" He fell back on the straw sack.

From the corridor a faint light shone in. Beyond, the doors of several guest chambers of the inn stood open, and Maria was arranging the beds for the night. Carlo stood over his brother and looked at him lying there with inflamed face and bluish lips, his damp hair sticking to his forehead, looking years older than he was. And slowly he began to understand. There could be nothing except the blindman's mistrust from to-day onwards. For a long time it must have slumbered in him and he must have lacked only the occasion, perhaps the courage to vent it. And all that Carlo had done for him had had been in vain; in vain his repentance, in vain the sacrifice of his whole life. What ought he to do now? He must go on now, day after day, who knew how much longer? guiding him through his eternal night, being faithful to him, begging for him and gaining thereby no other recompense than mistrust and hard words. If his brother held him for a thief, then any stranger would trust him the

same or better than he. In truth to leave him alone, to go away forever from him—that was the wisest thing to do.

Then Geronimo would clearly perceive his injustice, for then he would first experience what it meant to be deceived and robbed, to be alone and wretched, and he himself? How ought he to commence life? For he was not yet too old, to be sure; if he was alone for himself he could still make a commencement at many things. As hostler, at the very least, he would understand anywhere his work. But while these thoughts were passing through his brain, his eyes remained all the time fastened on his brother. And suddenly he saw him before him, alone by the side of a sunny road, sitting on a stone with his wide-open eyes staring up to heaven, whose light could not dazzle him, and with his hands stretching out into the night which was always about him. And he felt if the blindman had no one else in the world except him, so he, too, had no one else except this brother of his. He understood that his love for this brother of his was the whole meaning of his life, and knew for the first time in full clarity that the mere belief that the blindman returned this love and forgave him, had enabled him to endure so patiently all his misery. He could not at once renounce this hope. He must either put up with this mistrust or find a means by which he could persuade the blindman of the groundlessness of his suspicion. . . . Yes, if he could only, in some way, obtain a gold piece! If he could say to the blindman, early on the morrow: "I have only held it back so that you shouldn't drink it up with the workmen, so that no one should steal it from you . . . or something else."

Steps approached on the wooden stairs; the travellers were going to rest. Suddenly an idea flashed through his brain, to go and knock outside and to tell the strangers in

good faith of the day's misadventure and to ask them for twenty francs. But at the same moment he recognised that he was completely out of consideration! They would not, for a minute, believe the whole tale. And he remembered at once how terrified one of them, the pale one, had been as they had driven past when he, Carlo, had suddenly loomed in the dark in the front of the carriage.

He stretched himself down on the straw sack.

It was quite dark in the room. He heard now how the workmen, loudly talking and with heavy steps, went down over the wooden stairs. Soon after, two doors shut. The hostler went once more up and down the steps, then everything was still. Carlo only heard Geronimo's heavy breathing. Soon his thoughts became confused as his dreams began. When he awoke, deep darkness still surrounded him. He looked towards the place where the window was. Straining his eyes he perceived in the impenetrable blackness a deep gray square. Geronimo continued to sleep still the heavy sleep of the drunken man. And Carlo thought of the day which was the morrow; and it made him shudder. He thought of the night after this day, and the day after that night, of the future which lay before him, and a shudder at the loneliness which awaited him shook him. Why had he not been more courageous last night? Why had he not gone to the strangers and begged twenty francs? Perhaps they would have had compassion on him. And yet . . . perhaps it was a good thing that he had not begged from them. But, why was it a good thing? . . . He sat up suddenly and felt his heart beating. He knew now why it was a good thing. If they had refused him it might have made them suspicious of him . . . it, but, . . . He stared towards the gray patch which began to lighten dully.

That thing which, against his own

will, had passed through his brains was of course impossible, absolutely impossible! . . .

The door outside was barred, and moreover, they might wake up . . . Yes, there . . . the gray patch of light in the midst of the dark was the new day . . .

Carlo arose as though it dragged him thither and pressed his forehead against the cold window pane. Why had he arisen then? To consider it? To essay it? . . . What then? . . . It was without doubt impossible, and besides, it was a crime! A crime? What did twenty francs mean to such people who, for their own pleasure, travelled thousands of miles? They would probably not notice at all that they lacked it . . . He went to the door and opened it softly. Opposite, two steps distant, was the other closed. On a nail in the doorpost hung some clothes. Carlo passed his hand over them. . . . Yes if people left their purses in their pockets, life indeed was a simple thing. Soon no one would need to go begging any more. . . .

But the pockets were empty. Now, what more was there to do? He went back again into his room and lay down upon the straw sack. Perhaps there was some better way of getting twenty francs,—a way less dangerous and more in accordance with the law. If in truth he was to hold back every time a few centissimi from the alms until he had collected together twenty francs, and then bought the gold piece? . . . But what a time it would take! months, perhaps a year. Ah, if he only had the courage! Once again he stood out in the passage. He examined the door over . . . What kind of a crack was it that fell perpendicularly from the top to the floor? Was it possible? the door was only shut to, not closed? . . . But why was he so astonished at it? For some months the door had not fastened. Moreover, he remembered that only three times during this summer had people

slept there, twice they were artisans and once a tourist who had injured his foot. The door did not close—he needed now only courage—yes, and luck! Courage? The worst that could happen to him was that both should wake up, and then he could always find an excuse. He peered through the crack into the room. It was not so dark as to prevent him perceiving the outlines of two forms laid on the bed. He listened attentively. They were breathing quietly and regularly. Carlo opened the door and entered the room on his bare feet quite noiselessly. The two beds occupied the length of the wall opposite the window. In the middle of the room was a table. Carlo crept up to it. He passed his hand over its surface and felt a bundle of keys, a pocket knife, a small book—nothing else. . . . Of course it was so! . . . How could he have ever thought that they would put their money on the table! Ah, now he would go away. And yet it perhaps only needed a good snatch and the money would be his. And he approached the bed near the door; here on the chair lay something. He felt of it; it was a revolver. . . . Carlo drew it towards him. . . . Were it not better for him to take possession of it? But why had this man laid his revolver ready to hand? If he awoke and noticed him . . . No, no it would be better to say:

"It is three o'clock, *gnädiger* Herr, time to get up!" . . . And he let the revolver lie.

And he crept farther into the room. Here upon the other chair among the linen . . . Santa Maria! that was it . . . that was a purse! He took it in his hand! . . . At that moment he heard a low creaking. With a quick movement he stretched himself at full length by the foot of the bed. . . . Once again this creaking . . . a heavy breathing . . . a clearing of someone's throat. . . . then again stillness, deep stillness. Carlo remained lying

on the floor, the purse in his hand and waited. Nothing stirred again. Already the dawn palely fell into the room. Carlo dared not rise but crept forward on the floor to the door which stood wide enough open to allow him to pass, crept out onto the passage, and here he first slowly rose with a deep breath. He opened the purse; it had three divisions. To the left and right only small silver. Carlo next opened the middle division which was closed by another fastening and felt three twenty franc pieces. For a moment he thought of taking two from it, but he quickly put this temptation from him, taking out only one gold piece and shutting the purse. Then he knelt down, peeped through the door into the room which continued completely still, and then he gave the purse a shove so that it landed under the second bed. When the stranger woke up he would believe that it had fallen down from the chair.

Carlo rose slowly. The floor however, creaked slightly and at that moment he heard a voice from within the room: "What's that? what's the matter then?" Carlo quickly took two steps backwards holding his breath and slipped into his own room. He was in safety and listened. . . . Yet another creak of the bed and then all was still. Between his fingers he held the gold piece. He had succeeded . . . he had succeeded! He had twenty francs and he could say to his brother: "You see I am no thief," and they could once again to-day go on their wanderings . . . to the south, to Bormio, then further south to Vetlin . . . then to Tirano . . . to Edole . . . to Breno . . . and to the Lake of Iseo, as in the previous years. There would be no suspicions aroused, for he had himself already said to the landlord: "In a couple of days we are going down."

It became lighter and lighter. The whole room lay in gray twilight. Ah if Geronimo would awake soon! It

was so pleasant out on the road in the early day. They would set out yet before dawn. A good morning to the landlord, to the hostler, and to Maria too, and then away, away . . . And as soon as they were two hours away, already near the valley, he would speak to Geronimo.

Geronimo stretched and expanded himself. Carlo called to him: "Geronimo!"

"Now what's the matter?" And he started up with his two hands and sat up.

"Geronimo, we will get up."

"Why?" And he turned his blind eyes on his brother. Carlo knew that Geronimo now recollected the occurrence of yesterday, but he knew too that he would not utter a syllable about it before he was drunk again.

"It's cold, Geronimo, we'll be going. It won't clear up. I think we'd better be going. By noon we can be in Boladore."

Geronimo got up. The bustle of the awakening household became perceptible. Below in the court the landlord spoke with the hostler. Carlo got up and betook himself below. He was always early astir and went often in the early dawn out on the road. He went up to the landlord and said:

"We're going to say good-bye."

"Ah, you're going already today?" asked the landlord.

"Yes. It already begins to freeze too bitterly when a fellow stands in the yard and the wind blows through one."

"Well remember me to Baldette if you go down to Bormio, and he mustn't forget to send me the oil."

"Yes, I'll remember you. As for the rest—last night's lodgings"—he put his hand in his bag.

"Let be, Carlo," said the landlord, "the twenty centissimi I'll make a present of to your brother; I too, have listened to his singing. Good morning."

"Thank you," Carlo said, "at any rate we are not in such a hurry as

all that. We'll see you again when you come back from the village. Bormio will remain I think in the same spot, won't it?"

He laughed and went up the wooden stairs. Geronimo stood in the middle of the room and said:

"Now, I'm ready to go."

"A moment," said Carlo.

From an old chest of drawers, that stood in a corner of the room, he took their few possessions and packed them up in a bundle. Then he said: "A fine day, but very cold."

"I know," said Geronimo. The two went out of the room.

"Go quietly," Carlo said, "the two who came last night sleep here."

They trod warily by.

"The landlord sends his greetings to you," Carlo said. "He has let us off the twenty centissimi for last night's room. Now he has gone to the village and won't be back for two hours. But then we shall see him again next year."

Geronimo did not answer. They took the road which lay before them in the dim dawn. Carlo took hold of his brother's arm and both in silence stepped out on the downward road. After a short walk they speedily reached the spot where the road began to descend below in long draw-out windings. Mist rose upwards in their faces, while above them the hills appeared from the clouds as though caught in a noose. And Carlo thought: "Now I will speak to him." But Carlo said nothing and taking the gold piece out of his pocket gave it to his brother. The latter took it in the fingers of his right hand, then put it up to his cheek and his forehead. At last he nodded.

"I knew it all along," he said.

"Of course," answered Carlo, looking astonished at Geronimo.

"Even if the stranger hadn't told me anything, I should have undoubtedly known it."

"Of course," Carlo said perplexed.

"But then you understand why in front of the others up there . . .

I was afraid that you might at once go spend the whole lot . . . And, don't you see, Geronimo, it's about time now, I've been thinking, that you bought yourself a new coat and a shirt and shoes too, I think; that's why I've . . ."

The blindman shook his head violently "Why?" and he passed a hand over his coat, "that's good enough, that's warm enough. We're going to the south now."

Carlo did not mark that Geronimo seemed in no wise to be glad, that he had not excused himself. And he went on saying:

"Geronimo, wasn't I right then? Why aren't you glad? Now we've got it, haven't we? Now it's all ours. If I had told you about it up there, who knows — oh, it's a good thing that I didn't tell you about . . . there is no doubt of that!"

Whereupon Geronimo broke out:

"Just listen to your lying, Carlo! I have had enough of it."

Carlo stood still and let the arm of his brother fall.

"I'm not lying!"

"Oh, I know you are lying . . . You're always. You've lied to me hundreds of time! . . . Besides you would have kept it back for yourself hadn't you become afraid. That's how it is!"

Carlo bowed his head and answered never a word. He took the blindman's arm again and went on with him. How it hurt him, Geronimo speaking in this way! But he was really astonished that he was not injured more.

The mist parted. After a long silence Geronimo said:

"It is going to be hot."

He spoke indifferently, to himself, as he had a hundred times said before, and Carlo knew at that moment — for Geronimo had not changed himself—he had been always a thief so far as Geronimo was concerned.

"Are you hungry now?" he asked. Geronimo nodded, and taking at the same time some cheese and bread

from his coat pocket he began to eat.

The post from Bormio met them. The driver shouted to them:

"Going down already?"

Then came some other carriages—all going up.

"The valley breeze," said Geronimo, and at the same moment after a steep turn the Veltlin lay at their feet.

"Indeed he has not changed a bit," Carlo thought. "Now I have stolen for him . . . and, besides, it has been no use."

The mist below them became thinner and thinner, the rays of the sun piercing holes therein. And Carlo thought:

"It wasn't perhaps a wise step to leave the inn so abruptly. The purse lay under the bed, which is probably suspicious."

But how indifferent the whole thing seemed! What worse could happen to him? His brother, whose eyesight he had destroyed, though he hadn't stolen from him and had believed it for years past, and would always believe it—what worse could happen to him?

There below them lay the big white hotel bathed in the morning light, and farther down, where the valley itself began to stretch out, the straggling village. Silently the two went on, and Carlo's hand always rested on the blindman's arm. They passed by the hotel park, and Carlo saw guests in light summer clothes upon the terrace sitting at breakfast.

"Where do you want to rest?" asked Carlo.

"Oh, in the *Eagle*, like we always have."

When they reached the small inn at the end of the village, they turned in. Then they sat down in the café and had wine given them.

"What are you doing so early down here?" asked the landlord.

Carlo started a little at this question. "Is it then so early? The tenth or eleventh of September—not it?"

"Last year I am sure it was a great deal later when you came down."

"It's so cold up there," Carlo said. "Last night we froze. By the bye, I've got to tell you that you aren't to forget to send up the oil."

The atmosphere in the café was stuffy and close. A strange unrest possessed Carlo. He would have liked to be out in the open again, upon the highway that stretched away to Tirane, to Edole, to the Lake of Iseo, anywhere away in the distance! Suddenly he stood up.

"Are we going already?" asked Geronimo.

"We really ought to be this afternoon in Boladore at the *Hart*, the mid-day stopping-place of the carriages. It's a good place."

And they went. The barber Benozzi stood smoking in front of his shop.

"Good morning," he cried. "Now then, how are things looking up there? Last night you had a good snowfall?"

"Yes, yes," said Carlo, and quickened his pace.

The village lay behind them; the road stretched on white between meadows and vineyards beside the babbling stream. The sky was blue and still.

"Why did I do it?" Carlo thought. He looked sideways at the blindman. Did his face look otherwise than before? He had always known it. "I have always been alone . . . and he has always hated me." And it came on him as though he were walking on under a heavy burden, which he dare not ever cast from his shoulders, and as though he could see the night in which Geronimo was moving at his side, while the sun lay lighting up every road.

And they went on, went on, went on for hours. From time to time Geronimo sat down upon a milestone, or the pair leaned over the side of a bridge to rest. They passed through another village. Carriages stood before the inn. Travellers had dis-

mounted and were walking up and down; but the two beggars made no halt. Again they were out on the open road. The sun climbed up higher and higher; mid-day must be near. It was a day in a thousand.

"The Boladore tower," Geronimo said.

Carlo looked up. He was amazed at the way Geronimo could exactly reckon distances; to be sure there was the Boladore tower on the horizon. A fair distance farther on someone was approaching them. It looked to Carlo as if the stranger had been sitting by the roadside and suddenly got up. The figure approached. Now Carlo perceived it was a gendarme whom he had so often met on the road. In spite of that Carlo started slightly. But as the man came nearer he recognised him and recovered himself. It was Pietre Tenelli. Only in May last the two beggars had sat together with him in Raggazzi's inn in Merignone, and he had told them a dreadful story of how he had been once nearly stabbed to death by a single dagger stroke.

"There's someone standing still," said Geronimo.

"Tenelli, the gendarme," Carlo answered.

They had now come up with him.

"Good morning, Herr Tenelli," Carlo said and halted before him.

"It so happens," the gendarme said, "I must for the time being take both of you to the station in Boladore."

"What," cried the blindman.

Carlo grew pale.

"How is it possible?" he thought. "But it can't refer to it. They can't know down here yet at any rate!"

"It seems at any rate to be your way," the gendarme said, laughing, "nothing bad's going to happen if you come along with me."

"Why don't you say something, Carlo?" asked Geronimo.

"Oh, yes . . . I say . . . I beg your pardon, Herr Gendarme,

how is it possible . . . what must we then . . . or rather, what must I . . . in truth, I don't know . . ."

"It just so happens. Perhaps too you are not guilty. What do I know. At any rate we received notice from the commandant by telegraph that we were to hold you, because you were suspected, highly suspected, of having stolen the people's money up there. But it is possible, too, that you are innocent. But come forward!"

"Why do you say nothing, Carlo?" asked Geronimo.

"I was saying . . . oh yes. I was saying . . ."

"Now come along! What's the sense of standing about on the road! The sun is burning. In an hour we can be right there at the place itself."

Carlo took as usual Geronimo's arm and they went slowly on, the gendarme behind them.

"Carlo, why do you say nothing?" Geronimo asked again.

"But what would you, Geronimo, what must I say? It will all come out. I myself don't know . . ."

And the thought crossed his mind: "Must I explain to him before we are in the court?" . . . It won't do! The gendarme is listening to us. . . . Now what's to be done? Of course in court I shall tell the truth.

No one would believe this cock and bull story . . . Geronimo didn't once believe it . . . And he looked sideways at him. The blindman's head nodded up and down in his old fashion, beating time as they went along and his empty eyes stared into the heavens. And Carlo knew all of a sudden what kind of thoughts lay behind that forehead. . . . "So that's how things stand," he was quite sure Geronimo was thinking. "Carlo doesn't only steal from me, he steals too from other people. . . . Yet everything is all right for him, he has eyes that see and yet he makes such use of them. . . . Yes most assuredly Geronimo was thinking that . . . and then too the

fact that no money will be found on me, won't aid me—not in the eyes of the court, not in the eyes of Geronimo. They will lock me up and him. . . . Yes, him just like me, for he has at least the money." And he could not go on thinking, he felt his thoughts were so muddled. It appeared to him as though he did not understand anything more about the whole business, and he only knew one thing that he would allow himself to be put in prison for a year with pleasure . . . or for ten, if only Geronimo knew that he had become a thief for him alone!

And suddenly Geronimo stopped short, so that Carlo had to halt.

"Now, then what's the matter?" the gendarme said fretfully. "Forward! forward!" But he then beheld with amazement the blindman let his guitar fall upon the ground and, raising his arms, grope with his two hands for his brother's cheeks. Then he brought his lips to Carlo's mouth, who at first did not understand what had happened to him, and kissed him.

"Are you off your head?" the gendarme cried. "Forward! forward! I don't want to be roasted!"

Geronimo picked up his guitar from the ground without uttering a word. Carlo released a deep breath and placed his hand again on the blind man's arm. And he smiled to himself with a wonderful expression of happiness.

"Forward!" cried the gendarme. "Are you willing at last?" . . . and he gave Carlo a push between the ribs.

And Carlo guiding with a firm pressure the blindman's arm, went on again forward. He took a much stronger step, as in the old days. The smile would not fade from his countenance. It came to him that nothing bad could now happen to him—either at the hands of the law or from anywhere else in the world. He had his brother again! . . . No, he had him for the first time. . . .

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